

A Brock Romance

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Summary: Brock's a bit obsessive about girls . . . but maybe he'll take a turn for the better.

A Brock Romance

A Pok  mon Love Story

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>
 Ash sighed as Brock and Misty ran to opposite sides of the street. Misty pressed her face up against the window of a pok  mon breeder's shop.

> "Oh, that's so cute!" Her high voice carried clearly above the clamour of the busy street.
 Brock, on the other hand, had attached himself to some poor girl who was trying to walk her vulpix.

> "Will you go on a date with me?" he begged. The girl stared at him in terror, then snatched up her vulpix and took off in the other direction.
 Ash groaned and looked away, trying to disassociate himself from his two companions. He shoved his hands in his pockets and looked at Pikachu instead. The yellow rodent was looking rather distressed.

> "C'mon, Pikachu, let's get to the pok  mon center."
 "Pika pika!" Pikachu agreed fervently.

> Ash lifted his head and stepped forward    only to hear an outraged squall. He looked down in shock. He'd just stepped on a bulbasaur.
 "Wha   " ?" He automatically checked his pok  balls. No, this wasn't his.

> "Bulbasaur!"
 SMACK! Ash saw stars. When his vision cleared, the girl who had just pegged him with her pok  dex was glaring at him over the head of her injured pok  mon.

> "Hey!" Ash yelled. "What'd you have to go and do that for?" The girl gave him a death look while checking her bulbasaur for further injury.
"Can't you watch where you're putting your big stupid feet?" She stood up, cradling her pok  mon protectively.

>"Y'know, Ash, I've wondered the same thing at least a hundred times," Misty commented. Ash jumped. He hadn't heard her walk up behind him.
"Stay out of this Misty!"

>She blithely ignored him, and stuck her hand out to the other girl. "Hi. I'm Misty. This is Ash. Is your Bulbasaur all right?"
The girl hesitantly shook Misty's hand. "I'm Daphne. Daphne Oak. And Bulbasaur will be all right. No thanks to you," she added to Ash.

>"Oak?" Ash stared at her, really seeing her for the first time. She was almost as tall as Brock, very thin, with a long, dark brown braid and green eyes. Her uplifted chin and arrogant manner seemed very familiar. "Are you related to Gary Oak?"
Daphne gave a derisive snort and tossed her head. "He's my cousin. Not like it matters. He's a jerk who wouldn't give a sick pokÃ©mon a crust of bread. No surprise, since he comes from the same hick town as my grandfather, who isn't all there either." She shrugged.

>Ash gaped at her. She was Gary's cousin, all right. "Pallet's not a hick town!" Misty was trying unsuccessfully to stifle her giggles.
"C'mon Daphne. I want you to meet Brock." She pointed across the street to the other pokÃ©mon trainer, who was standing on the sidewalk looking in bewilderment after the girl who had fled. >
As they ate supper in the pokÃ©mon center that night, all Misty and Brock could talk about was Daphne Oak. Daphne this, Daphne that.

>"Y'know, Ash," said Misty, as she carried a bite of rice to her mouth, "Daphne's been working with pokÃ©mon since she was six years old."
"Yeah!" said Brock enthusiastically. "And now she's primarily training poison pokÃ©mon. They're really tough to train."

>"Brock, did you know she's got a pikachu too?"
"Chu!"

>"Really? Ash, maybe you should ask her for some pointers. We're going to be here for a few days, after all, and â€"
Ash stood up and stomped out of the room. He had had about enough of Gary's cousin Daphne. It was typical, he reflected. Anyone related to Gary would be just as arrogant, and be just as justified. And she had a pikachu, too. It wasn't fair. Why, just once in his life, couldn't he be better at something than Gary Oak or any other member of his stupid family?

>Misty stared at Ash's retreating back. She looked at Brock. "Uh oh. I think I know what's wrong."
Brock looked at her. "What is it?"

>Misty sighed, and chewed her rice. "When we met Daphne, she and Ash didn't hit it off too well. He stepped on her Bulbasaur by accident. I saw, and it wasn't really his fault, but she got mad at him, and I kind of sided with her. Then we found out that she's Gary Oak's cousin."
Brock raised his eyebrows. "So?"

>"She can be just as mean as he is, when she's mad. And she was mad at Ash. So now, he doesn't like her 'cause she hit him in the head, and he doesn't like her 'cause she's Gary's cousin, and he doesn't like her because she's a better pokÃ©mon trainer than he is."

Brock nodded sagely, and chewed on a piece of chicken. "I see," he mumbled through his food. "So, what we have to do is make Ash realize Daphne's not so bad."

>Misty frowned at her plate. "Somehow I don't think it will be that easy."
"Pika!"

>
Daphne knelt beside Bulbasaur's cushioned bed. She never confined her pokÃ©mon to pokeballs, except when she was expecting a battle.

>"Bulbasaur!"
She smiled fondly at her pokÃ©mon. "What is it, baby?" She always used silly sweet terms with her pokÃ©mon.

>"Bulba!"
Daphne giggled and fed it a rice ball from the plate at

her knee. "Are you feeling better now baby? Did the mean old boy hurt you?"

>Bulbasaur didn't answer, being engrossed in chewing on the rice ball. Daphne watched it as her thoughts turned to Ash. She wasn't too impressed with him. First of all, he didn't watch out for defenceless pok  mon, and second of all, he was friends with her loser cousin, Gary. Misty was nice, though a bit ditzy, and Brock   "
Daphne laughed out loud. Brock was a lost cause. In the half hour she had spent with Misty and Brock, he had approached five different girls to beg for a date. As far as Daphne had been able to tell, he hadn't known any of them. But, there was something about him all the same . . . He set her stomach fluttering, and she wasn't sure why.

>Daphne jumped to her feet and ran to the phone, dialing in her grandfather's number.
The screen blinked a few times, then Professor Oak appeared.

>"Yes? Hello?"
Daphne sighed. She wasn't all that fond of grandfather either, but he had given her a head start in pok  mon training, so she was polite.

>"Hi, grandfather. It's Daphne."
"Oh, hello, Daphne. What's happening? Has Gary made it to Azure city yet?"

>Daphne shook her head. "No, not yet. I think he might pass us by entirely." She heaved a dramatic sigh. "And I was so looking forward to seeing him. But no, it's one of his friends. An Ash Ketchum."

Professor Oak frowned when Daphne said that Gary might pass them by, but smiled at mention of Ash. "Ah, Ash. You know, I have high hopes for that boy. He's managed to work quite well with that pikachu of his. You just have to be certain he gets out of bed on time." He chortled as if at a private joke. Daphne didn't get it, and shrugged.

>"Yeah, well, he's here, so maybe our pikachus can get together." Like she had any intention of letting that clumsy excuse for a pok  mon trainer anywhere near her pikachu.
"What a lovely idea!" Professor Oak clapped his hands. "Well, I must be going now. I have a pizza due to arrive any moment now. Bye bye Daphne."

>Daphne smiled stiffly. "Bye Grandfather." She hung up the phone and stared at the blank screen for a long time.

>The sunlight crept in the window and over Ash's face as he slept. He'd gone to bed in a huff last night, and hadn't bothered to put on his pyjamas. His hat had worked under his head, and was now rubbing red lines into his face. Ash was lying on his stomach with his mouth open, snoring loudly. Pikachu was in a similar position on Ash's pillow.
Across the room, Brock lay on his back on a bed. His pillow was covering his face, and he was snoring just as loudly as Ash. His arm and leg were hanging off the edge of the bed, over a mountain of covers that he had kicked off in his sleep.

>Slowly the door cracked open. Misty stuck her head in and looked around. None of the three sleepers stirred.
"Zzzzzzz   "

>"Ngh   " (snort)"
"Chu . . . "

>Misty grinned. She stepped further into the room, turned, and beckoned. Slowly, Daphne stuck her head around the door.
"Misty," she hissed, "are you sure this is a good   "

>"Shh!" Misty hushed her. "Of course I'm sure. It's past time for them to wake up anyways!" She grinned at Daphne. "Now, pass me that feather."
Daphne raised her eyebrows, then shrugged and handed Misty the feather.

>Misty took it, and tiptoed across the room to Ash's bed. She stood over him like some kind of malevolent colossus, the feather poised. Daphne grinned as Misty delicately tickled the tip of Ash's nose with

the feather.
Ash wrinkled his nose and snorted, sounding remarkably like Brock as he did so. Daphne giggled and quickly smothered it with her hand. Ash blinked and both girls froze. He opened his eyes. Misty stood ready to run.
>"G'morning Misty . . . " he muttered, rolling over and falling back asleep.
Daphne and Misty let out identical sighs of relief.

>"Misty!" Daphne whispered. "Let's go!"
Misty shook her head. "No way! This is too good a chance to pass up!"
>Daphne frowned and looked across the room at Brock. He looked awfully cute when he was asleep, she decided. His hair was a mess, though. She was halfway across the small room to Brock's bed when Misty turned and stared at her.
"Daphne! What are you doing?"

>Daphne stopped, looked down at herself, and blushed bright red. "Uh . . . nothing. Let's go. I'm hungry."
Misty sighed, dropped the feather, and nodded. "Yeah, me too. I think Joy the nurse was going to make pancakes for breakfast."
>Daphne's stomach gurgled. It had been a while since she'd had anything except her own cooking, which wasn't all that great. "It would be crueler to just let them sleep through food, don't you think?"
Misty giggled. "Yeah!" She grabbed Daphne's hand, yanking her out of the room. "What are you waiting for?"
>
After Misty dragged Daphne out of the room, Brock cautiously shifted his pillow off his face. He opened one eye carefully, then stopped snoring. He then sat up, running his hand through his spiky hair.
>"Ash." No answer. "Ash, wake up." Ash continued snoring. Brock sighed, and dragged himself out of bed. He shut the bedroom door, then stripped off his pyjamas and pulled on his pants and a clean shirt. He then stood over Ash, trying to decide if he should wake him up or not. The lure of pancakes was too strong. Brock headed out after the girls. A few seconds later, Pikachu raised his head, then hopped off the bed after him. Ash slumbered on alone.

>Brock and Pikachu had almost reached the kitchen when they heard Misty's high voice again.
"Yeah, Ash is a bit sad, for a pokÃ©mon trainer. I mean, he'll never learn how to _train_, instead of just taking care of his pokÃ©mon. He totally loves them, but I really think he'd make a better breeder, like Brock wants to be." Misty was trying to heal the breach between Daphne and Ash.
>"Brock wants to be a breeder?" That was Daphne. She sounded as if her mouth was full.
"Mm-hmm." Now Misty's mouth was full. Brock took the momentary lull to enter the room, Pikachu at his heels.

>"Morning Misty, Daphne, Joy." Joy turned from the large stove to smile at him, then returned to her cooking. Misty waved a forkful of pancake at him. Daphne looked up, saw him, blushed beet red, and dropped her gaze to her plate. She mumbled something that might have been 'good morning'.
Brock raised an eyebrow, then sat down across from her at the small table. "What's for breakfast, Joy?"

>Joy set a plate down in front of him. "Pancakes. Syrup is on the counter, and there are some more on that plate," she pointed at a covered dish, "for Ash when he wakes up. I'm going to feed the pokÃ©mon."
"Thanks Joy." Brock picked up his fork and tucked into his breakfast, inhaling it in record time. Misty resumed her chatter.

>"Now where was I? Oh yeah. Ash really cares about his pokÃ©mon. That's why he's not evolving Pikachu right away."
"Pika!"

>Misty looked irritated. "Pikachu, didn't Joy get you breakfast?"

"Chu . . . " The little rodent looked downcast. Daphne bent down to rummage through the bag that was sitting at her feet. She came back up with a tupperware container.
>"Here, try this."
Brock took the container and sniffed the contents. "What is it?"
>Daphne looked at him and seemed to lose her voice. She swallowed and tried again. "It's what I feed my pikachu. My Grandfather helped me develop it."
Brock nodded and set the container in front of Pikachu, who fell to with great appetite. "Well, Pikachu seems to like it," he said with a smile.
>Daphne nodded wordlessly, then suddenly looked at her watch. "Um, I really have to go now. Thanks for inviting me to breakfast, Misty." She started to stand up. Brock grabbed her bag and held it out. She grabbed hold of it, but he wouldn't let go. Not right away.

"Where are you going?"
>"I, um . . . " Daphne looked stricken. "Um, one of my pokÃ©mon is on a feeding schedule, and his mealtime is in 15 minutes, so I really have to run." She tugged at the bag. Brock still wouldn't let go.

"What kind of pokÃ©mon is it?"
>Daphne looked ready to run, bag or no bag. "Um, an ekans."

"Misty, isn't that what Team Rocket uses? We should go look at it. Find out more about it."
>Misty frowned. "But Brock, I was going to take Starmie to the pool today."
Brock smiled. "All right, just I'll go with you then, Daphne." He let her take the bag. She looked a little deflated.

>"Okay." She swung her bag over shoulder. "Bye Misty." She sighed. "C'mon, Brock."
Brock quickly got up from the table and followed her out, grabbing his bag from where it had been sitting at the door.

>
Stupid, Daphne thought. Stupid, stupid, stupid. She and Brock were walking down the main street of Azure city. She was as far away from him as it was possible to be and remain on the same sidewalk. Daphne watched the concrete sidewalk go past under her feet, not daring to look at Brock. He, darn his adorable smile, wasn't at all uncomfortable. He was cheerfully pointing out shops that looked interesting, asking her questions that she answered with one word.

>Stupid, she thought to herself again. You knew he would follow you. You knew it as soon as he grabbed your bag. So why didn't you make up something he couldn't follow you to, like a doctor's appointment? She sighed. At eight o'clock on a Sunday? Yeah right.
Daphne didn't understand why Brock made her so nervous. As soon as she'd seen him, snoring loudly on his bed that morning, she'd gotten butterflies in her stomach big enough to carry a bicycle. Was it his smile? His messy hair? His dark eyes? His â€œ"

>Stupid. Stop thinking about it. You'll go home, tell him all about Ekans, and he'll leave. You'll never see him again. Simple.

Somehow, she didn't feel better.

>
Brock looked over at Daphne, who was watching each step she took as if she were afraid it would be her last. Pikachu was riding on her shoulder, holding onto her dark brown braid to steady himself. Her orange tank top was hanging loosely from her thin shoulders. She gripped the strap of her bag with both hands, and her knuckles were white.

>Brock frowned. Something was making Daphne very nervous, and he didn't know what. All he could do was try to put her at ease with harmless chatter.
"Oh, look, a pokÃ©mon breeder's shop. Maybe I'll stop in there later and see if I can pick up some new recipes."

>"Mmm."
Brock sighed and tried again. "Do you know if that restaurant is any good?"
>"No."
"Daphne, there's a gigantic Pidgy about to land on your head."
>"Kachu!"
"Okay."
>"Daphne, your hair is on fire."
"Yeah."
>Brock looked at the sky and refrained from commenting.
"Daphne." This time he waited for her acknowledgement before continuing.

>She glanced at him quickly. "What?"
"How much farther is your house?"
>"Oh." She let out a small sigh of what appeared to be relief and relaxed slightly. "It's just around that curve in the path, once you get off the main road. Another five minutes is all."
And once we're alone . . . Daphne's nervousness wouldn't let her finish the thought.
>And once we're alone, thought Brock, maybe I can find out what's bothering her.

>As soon as Daphne and Brock were out of sight, Misty ran back into the room where Ash was sleeping, followed by Pikachu.
"ASH!!" She jumped onto his bed, landing on his legs with a sharp bounce. "Wake up, Ash!"
>Ash did wake up, quite loudly.
"GAHHH!" He tried to jump out of bed, but couldn't, since Misty was sitting on his legs. "Aahh! I'm paralysed! Help! Doctor!"
>Misty groaned. "Ash! Stop fooling around and get out of bed!"

Ash lifted his head and looked at her. "Oh. It's you." He paused. "Why are you sitting on my legs?"
>Misty looked down at herself. "Oops." She giggled, and got off the bed. "NOW will you get up?"
Ash rolled over and sat up. "What's the big rush?"
>"Well, first of all you slept through breakfast. Second of all, Brock, Pikachu, and Daphne are on their way to Daphne's house. She's going to show him an ekans. Third of all, I wanted to take Starmie and Staryu to the pool, and I think Squirtle would like to take a swim. So what are you waiting for?" She stood over him with her hands on her hips.
Ash glared at Misty, then nodded. "You're right, Squirtle probably would like a swim. But," he looked around, "Where's Pikachu?"
>Misty looked impatient. "I just told you, he's with Brock and Daphne."
"Brock and â€" Daphne?" Ash looked stricken.
>"Yeah." Misty leaned closer and looked at Ash's face. "What's wrong, Ash?"
"But she's Gary's cousin!" Ash leapt out of bed, grabbed his bag, and was out the door, leaving Misty to stare after him.

>"Oh brother," she groaned, and ran after him.

>Daphne, still not looking at Brock, fished her keys out of the pocket of her shorts. She fumbled with them, trying to find the key to her front door. Suddenly a large brown hand covered hers gently.
"Here, let me." Brock took the keys away, looked carefully at the lock, and found the key that matched it easily. He slipped it into the lock, turned it, and pulled open the door, making an 'after you, my dear Alphonse' gesture. Daphne glared at him, then snatched the keys and strode into the house. Brock shrugged and followed.

>"Nice place you've got here, Daphne." She didn't answer him, just dropped her bag on a chair and headed towards the back of the small house.
"Hey Daphne, how old are you?"
>She stiffened suddenly, then her thin shoulders seemed to crumple as

she turned to face him. "Seventeen," she said quietly. She turned away again. "My pokémons are this way." She led him to a room that was almost as large as the rest of the house. There were about ten different pokémons lying on jungle gyms and cushions.
Daphne went to a tiny kitchenette at the back of the room. She start pulling plastic containers out of the fridge. "There are more out in the backyard." She mixed the contents of three containers in a dish, and added a few drops from a small bottle. "Ekans is in a room by himself though."

>Brock noticed that she seemed much calmer now when she was concentrating on something other than her shoes. "Why is he alone?"
Daphne frowned as she stirred the liquid in. "He's got some kind of flu he picked up from a wild ekans." She picked up the dish and headed towards the door next to the fridge. "Or maybe it wasn't wild. There were some troublemakers here at the time. A team of some sort. It might've been theirs."

>"Team Rocket?" he guessed, following her.
"Maybe," she said indifferently. She put a hand on the door knob and looked at him. "Now, whatever you say in here, say it quietly," she ordered. "Ekans doesn't like loud noises when he's sick."

>Brock nodded. "Yes, ma'am." She smiled briefly at him (for the first time, he realized. How different it made her look.) and opened the door.
The small room they entered was dim. The one window was open to let fresh air in, but the curtains were closed, keeping out most of the light. There were two low cots in the room, with a table between them. Ekans lay on one, and a bowl of water sat on the table beside it. It hissed feebly as they entered.

>"Ekans, stop that. It's only me," Daphne scolded gently. She went and knelt down beside the cot and set the dish on the table. "How are you, baby?" She stroked its head fondly, a small smile on her face. She looked exactly like a mother with her baby. She had also obviously forgotten Brock's existence.
Feeling distinctly uncomfortable, he cleared his throat. Daphne's smile crashed off her face and she stopped stroking her pokémon's head. She stared at Brock, as if trying to remember who he was. Then her usual expression of near-fright reappeared. She looked back at the pokémon.

>"Ekans, this is Brock. He's a trainer of earth pokémon." She picked up the dish again, and began hand-feeding Ekans. Brock stepped closer.
"His poison sacs are swollen. They should be massaged." His voice was low, but authoritative. He knelt down beside her and reached out to do just that. Daphne started to protest, but Ekans started to purr, rather than the hiss she'd been expecting.

>"I didn't realize you knew anything about poison pokémon," she said grudgingly.
Brock continued to massage Ekans. "Well, they're unique," he replied. "A lot of them are also classified as earth or plant, so I tried to learn about them."

>Daphne snorted derisively. "Too many people pay attention only to their own types of pokémon, and ignore others, and end up getting blasted in battle."
The doorbell rang. Brock frowned. Something would interrupt just as she was starting to relax again. He moved to get up at the same time as Daphne, and nearly knocked her over. He only managed to save her by grabbing her arms and pulling her in close to his chest.

>"Sorry," he whispered. "Are you all right?"
Her expression as she gazed up at him was unreadable in the darkened room. She was silent for a moment, then swallowed and nodded. "Yeah."

>Neither of them moved for a moment. Brock was very aware of how thin she was as he held her. Then the doorbell rang again. Daphne pulled away from him and pulled open the door. She ran through the pokémon

room towards the front of the house. "Coming!" she yelled. Brock chased after her.
The doorbell rang a third time as she reached the door. "All right, already," she muttered and yanked open the door. She took a step backwards and bumped into Brock as he came up behind her.

>"Gary. What are you doing here?"
Gary grinned arrogantly as he stood on her front step. "Well, cousin, aren't you even going to invite me in?"

>Daphne didn't move to let him enter. She forgot all about Brock's nearness and lifted her chin. Brock marvelled at the family resemblance that appeared in that motion.
"I'd rather not, Gary. What do you want?"

>"Well, I was in the area and Grandfather suggested I stop by and visit you. He said you'd been looking forward to seeing me." The insolent grin widened. He glanced at Brock. "Oh, but am I interrupting something? Perhaps I could come back later?"
Daphne sighed. "No, Gary. You're not interrupting anything. Come on in." She stepped back and ran into Brock again. She glared at him, then stepped around him to let Gary in.

>Gary strolled in, hands in his pockets. "So, cousin, what have you been up to lately?"
Daphne frowned. "Gary, as I'm sure you remember, I have a name. Use it." She turned and walked towards the back of the house.

>"Aren't you even going to introduce us, cousin?" Gary smiled broadly at Brock. Brock gave a cold brief smile in return. Daphne turned back to look at them.
"Gary, this is Brock, a pokÃ©mon trainer in town with a few friends. Brock, this is my cousin, Gary."

>Gary stuck out his hand to shake. Brock ignored it. "Yes, I know. We've met."
Gary pretended to look offended. "Have we? I'm sure I'd remember."

>Brock looked at him with something very close to dislike. "I'm sure you would. I'm travelling with Ash Ketchum."
Daphne started to walk to the back of the house again. "Gary," she shot over her shoulder, "Why don't you and Brock make yourselves comfortable in the living room? I have work to do."

>Gary, who had refrained from commenting on Ash, shook his head. "Oh, no, cousin. Let me help you." He moved to follow her, and tripped over Pikachu, who had been standing behind Brock. Pikachu growled. Gary backed off apprehensively.
The doorbell rang again. Daphne turned on her heel, and stalked between Brock and Gary to the door. "What now?" She jerked the door open. Ash and Misty stood there.

>Ash pushed his way in immediately. "Where's Pikachu?"
Daphne pointed at Gary's feet. "Right there. Please, save him from getting stepped on by my idiot cousin."

>"Gary!"
Gary smirked. "Hello, Ash. How many badges have you begged off trainers since the last time I saw you?"

>Brock glared. "Hey, Ash won his badges fair and square."
Gary dismissed him with a glance. "So you say, seeing as how he got the first one from you."

>Ash stomped up to Gary. "Are you implying that I cheated? That I don't deserve my badges?"
Gary snorted. "I'm not implying anything. I'm saying it right to your face!" The two boys glared at each other. Misty and Brock exchanged glances.

>"Ash . . . " Misty started to speak, but didn't have time to finish.
Daphne reached in between the two boys and pushed them apart.

"There will be no fights in my house," she said in a deadly voice.

"Take it outside and fight it out like pokÃ©mon trainers."

>Gary smirked again. "With pleasure, cousin."
"I'll take you any day of the week, Gary Oak!" Ash was just as eager.

>Daphne looked at Gary through half-closed eyes. "Gary, if you call me cousin one more time I will call grandfather and tell him what kind of antics you've been indulging yourself in. Nothing worthy of a true pokÃ©mon trainer. Now get out of my house."
"As you say . . . Daphne." Gary turned and walked out the still open front door, whistling. Misty and Ash watched him open-mouthed. Brock was watching Daphne. Her eyes were shining with fury and her cheeks were pink. She looked absolutely gorgeous.

>"Gary won't pick a fight with me, because he knows I'd whip his sorry rear," she said to Ash. "Also, I know too much about him that he doesn't want our grandfather to find out."
Ash picked up Pikachu. "Wow. Thanks Daphne. You saved me from a battle I might not have been able to win."

>Misty looked at Ash in shock. "You're actually going to admit that you're not the greatest trainer in the world yet? Ash, I'm impressed."
Ash ignored that.

>Daphne sighed, and looked Ash in the eyes. "Ash, I have to apologize. When we first met, I was pretty rude to you, because I thought you were friends with Gary, and," she blushed, "I didn't think you were much of a pokÃ©mon trainer. But judgements on impulse are often wrong, and," Daphne took a deep breath, "so was I. I'm sorry."
Ash smiled. "There's nothing to be sorry about. I really should have been watching where I was going, and," he blushed as well, "I didn't like you because you were Gary's cousin."

>Daphne grinned. "It wasn't by choice, let me tell you."
Misty smiled. "So now that's all settled, can we go to the pool now? Please?"

>Ash nodded. "Okay. Coming, Brock?"
Brock jumped slightly. He'd been watching Daphne blush. "Um, I'll catch up with you. I want to take another look at Ekans."

>Ash shrugged. "Okay." Misty smiled knowingly, but didn't say anything.
"Bye Daphne," and they both started the walk back to town.

>Daphne waved, and shut the door. She turned back to look at Brock, feeling nervous again. "You're not staying to look at Ekans, are you?" It was more of a statement than a question.
Brock looked startled, then smiled sheepishly. "No. Actually, I wanted to ask you a question."

>"Shoot." Daphne looked as if she thought he might really do it.
Brock sighed. "Daphne, why are you so tense? You act as though you're afraid I'm going to bite. I don't, I promise."

>Daphne looked down, not meeting his eyes. "Um, Brock . . . " A yell from outside cut her off.
"HELP!!!"

>She whirled and yanked open the door, and was running in seconds. Brock followed her as closely as possible.
Up at the curve in the path, Ash and Misty were trying to shift a huge branch that had fallen across the path. For a moment Daphne couldn't see why they seemed so frantic, and then realized . . . Pikachu was trapped under it.

>She started running faster.
Ash was almost crying. "Help! Oh, Pikachu, hold on!"

>Laughter over head made her look up. Gary was sitting in the tree, right over the jagged stump of the branch. It had been dead, and he had evidently kicked at it until it fell, right on Pikachu.
"Ash, do you have an empty pokeball?"

>Tears running down his face, Ash fumbled at his belt and handed her one. Daphne pushed the button to bring it to full size and took careful aim.
"What are you doing?" Ash whispered.

>"Watch," she replied. She raised her arm, and whipped the ball as hard as she could at her cousin's laughing face. It struck him dead

on, and he fell right out of the tree, landing with a thud. He was unconscious.
Daphne ignored Gary and looked at the branch.

"Misty, run back to my house. There's a woodsaw in my front closet with some gardening tools." She looked at Pikachu. The little rodent was whimpering quietly, and was very pale. "Hurry, Misty!"

>Misty took off running.
Daphne knelt next to Pikachu. "Ash, help me break off these little branches, so I can get a clear space to cut."

>As soon as they had cleared an area of the main branch, Misty was back with the saw.
"Brock, Ash, hold this branch steady," Daphne ordered. "We don't want me to slip and cut Pikachu." The two obeyed. "Now this wood is dry, so it should cut easily."

>Minutes slipped by as Daphne sawed as fast as she could. The branch was as thick as Brock's leg, and she had to be careful to aim away for Pikachu. Finally, she broke through.
"Keep holding that branch!" With the extra weight gone, Ash and Brock were able to lift the branch just enough for Daphne to gently slide Pikachu out from under it. She stood, with Pikachu in her arms. "Ash, come with me to the pokÃ©mon center. Brock, Misty, you stay here and take care of him," she jerked her chin at Gary, lying prone near the tree. She then started running towards town with Ash.

>
Misty found a length of rope in the same closet as the saw, and she and Brock used it to tie up Gary.

>"That'll hold him," Brock said with satisfaction. He was feeling a very deep anger towards Gary at the moment. It reflected the anger he'd seen shining in green eyes . . .
"Brock, when did you start hating Gary so much? This isn't just about Pikachu, is it?" Another statement instead of a question.

>Brock looked at Misty. Boy, he thought, you think someone's a ditz, and then they surprise you . . . "Anyone who would mistreat pokÃ©mon deserves whatever they get," he said out loud.
Misty raised her eyebrows. "I think you're more concerned about someone who would mistreat Daphne," she replied quietly.

>Brock stared at Misty, and opened his mouth to refuse her, then sighed and shook his head. "You're right. I don't know why, but she . . . she looks so brave when there are people around, or she gets mad, but she's so vulnerable when we're alone. And you should see her with her pokÃ©mon . . . She looks like a mother with her baby . . . "
"Yeah, she never could get a boyfriend, so she puts it all into her training." The acerbic voice cut through Brock's reverie. He and Misty both looked at Gary.

>Gary was awake, with a large purple bruise where he'd caught the pokeball in the face.
"And what do you mean by that?" Brock asked evenly.

>Gary laughed in a very irritating manner. "Daphne's destined to be alone. We've known it ever since she was fourteen."
Brock glared at him. "Gary, are you just blowing hot air again?"

>Gary glared back. "When she was fourteen, Daphne got sick. We had to send her to the big hospital in Cerulean city. She had," he smirked, "a bad experience with some guy and his sister. The guy pretended to like her to get her pokÃ©mon. Apparently it went pretty far. He got physical." Gary actually looked serious now. "Daphne won't go near a guy now. She says never again."
Brock stared. He'd thought she was scared, but he hadn't realized why.

>Misty stood up and walked over to Gary, hands on her hips. "Gary, you're scum. You've got a big mouth. You have no right to tell people personal things about about Daphne."
Gary smiled insultingly at Misty. "And what are you going to do about it, little girl?"

>Misty smiled coldly. "Absolutely nothing, because you're tied up,

and I'm not." She scuffed dirt at him with her shoe, then turned and walked back to Brock.

>Daphne and Ash burst into the lobby of the pok  mon center. Ash dashed up to the desk and started dinging the little bell that sat there.
"Nurse Joy! Nurse Joy!"

>Nurse Joy appeared in the doorway behind the desk, frowning. "Quiet please, we've got sick pok  mon here."
Daphne strode up behind Ash. "Joy, this is a sick pok  mon. A tree branch fell on him. It's kind of an emergency."

>Joy looked at Daphne, startled. "Daphne? One of yours?"
Daphne shook her head. "No, this is Gary's work. Can you take him?"

>Joy smiled. "For you, right away." She came around the desk and looked at Pikachu. "Oh dear. We'd better get right to work."

>Daphne was asleep on the couch in the lobby when Brock and Misty pushed Gary in ahead of them. Ash was looking at pictures on the wall. "I'd swear I've seen it before," he muttered.
"You wouldn't know one of those if it bit you," Gary sneered. Daphne didn't stir. Ash turned around.

>"I'd rather it bit you, Gary." He looked at Brock. "Did you have to bring him here?"
"We just came by to see how Pikachu was doing, then we're taking him to Officer Jenny."

>Joy came out of the emergency room at that moment. "Ash, Pikachu will be fine. No battle for a while though."
Ash ran across the room and hugged her. "Thankyou Joy!!! Thankyou thankyou thankyou!"

>Joy smiled.
"Ash," Brock said, "Can you and Misty take Gary to Officer Jenny? I want to talk to Daphne."

>Ash let go of Joy and nodded. "Okay, Brock. C'mon, Misty, let's go." He walked over and grabbed Gary's arm. "Who's laughing now, Oak?" he asked as they propelled him out the door again.
Brock smiled at Joy. "Could you excuse us please? I really have to talk to Daphne."

>Joy nodded. "Of course. I should get back to Pikachu."
"Thanks Joy."

>Joy bustled back into the emergency room, and left Brock standing in the lobby. He looked at Daphne, sleeping so peacefully on the couch. He went over and sat beside her.
"Daphne," he whispered. She stirred, shook her head, and tried to turn over, but was blocked by Brock taking up too much room. She opened her eyes and sat up.

>"Wha   ?" She looked at Brock, still half-asleep. "Is Pikachu okay?"
Brock grinned. "He's fine," he answered quietly. "You saved him."

>"Good." She yawned. "I had to save him for Ash," she yawned again and leaned on Brock's shoulder. Brock stiffened, then put his arms around her, not sure how she'd react. Daphne snuggled in close. "I had to save him, so Brock wouldn't leave me . . ."
Brock stared at her as she fell asleep again. Did I hear her right? he wondered. Does she want me to stay with her? He shook her gently.

>"Daphne. Daphne, wake up."
Daphne opened her eyes, and realized she was lying on someone's chest, snuggled against their neck. She sat bolt upright.

>"Where am I?"
Brock felt her stiffen, and let go before she could start to struggle.

>"Relax, Daphne, it's Brock."
"Brock?" She looked into his eyes, then her gaze skittered off to the side. "We're at the pok  mon center?"

>"Yeah."
"Is Pikachu all right?"

>Deja vu. Brock smiled. "Yeah. You saved him."
"Good." She looked

around. "I must have fallen asleep." She swung her feet to the floor and stood up, brushing the wrinkles out of her clothes.

>Brock bit his lip, wondering if now was the right time to bring up what he had to say. Daphne turned back to say something and saw the indecision on his face.
"What's wrong, Brock?"

>Brock looked up at her, saw the way her dark eyebrows met in a frown over her nose, saw the green eyes that reflected his face back at him. He stood up and placed his hands on Daphne's shoulders.

"Brock?" Her voice shivered slightly. "Brock, what are you doing?"

>"Do you know who you remind me of? My little sister Kelly." He smiled and shook his head. "She always used to protect the rest of our family, but she would never defend herself."
"What do you mean?"

>"Daphne, Gary told us what happened to you."
Daphne knew instantly what he was talking about. She stared at him, then pulled his hands from her shoulders and turned away.

>"I didn't want you to know about that." Her voice was almost inaudible.
"I think I had to know. Daphne," he sighed. "Daphne, look at me, please."

>She fidgeted nervously with her braid as she turned to face him again, not meeting his eyes.
"Daphne, you have so much to give, and you're only giving it to pokÃ©mon. Please, give to me, and I think I can give to you as well."

>Her eyes widened in surprise as she looked up at Brock, trying to tell if he was serious. To prove his point, he leaned in and kissed her gently.
"Brock, I . . . I don't know if I'm ready yet." She reached out and took his hand. "But when I am, I want you to be there."

>"But we're leaving tomorrow!"
Daphne smiled. "I know, Brock. Do you think Ash would mind if I came with you?"

>Brock laughed and hugged her. "He'd better not!"</div>

End
file.